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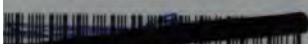
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AMERICAN & BRITISH VERSE
from The Yale Review

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A Book of Yale Review Verse,
1917

War Poems from The Yale Review,
1918

War Poems from The Yale Review
(Second Edition),
1919

Four Americans,
by Henry A. Beers,
1919

American and British Verse
from The Yale Review,
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American & British Verse

from The Yale Review

With a Foreword by John Gould Fletcher



NEW HAVEN

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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FOREWORD



SOMETIME during the past spring I was walking in London, and I happened to go into a bookshop devoted to the sale of poetry. The proprietor was overhauling his shelves, and as I chanced to know him personally, we fell into conversation. It appeared that he had on hand a number of books of poetry by American authors, which he had hitherto kept separate from the English product. He was now proposing to amalgamate them, by rearranging the entire collection alphabetically, under English poetry; a decision in which I entirely and whole-heartedly concurred.

It has been too much the fashion recently to insist that American literature should be considered as something entirely separate from the literature of the British Isles. As John Macy once said, American literature is a branch of English literature. That is not a limitation; it is a high title to glory. The American poets of to-day are just as truly the heirs of Chaucer and of Shakespeare as the English; the American novelists acknowledge their indebtedness to Defoe and Fielding. The roots of English literature are now planted on both sides of the Atlantic; doubtless the fruit will be diverse, but there is no reason why either country should find it bitter. Whether present-day American poetry or English poetry is the greater, is a

matter open to the friendly give-and-take of discussion; but surely an American poet can feel proud of adding something to that superb and noble language which has already been the chosen voice of so many of the world's ablest singers. And, whatever we add, it is only because we were given this instrument to reshape and revivify.

In these few pages, there are English and American poems standing side by side. Here is Masfield singing of the change that alters all things, a theme as old as poetry itself. Here is a great New England poet's beautiful tribute to the memory of the friend whom he, and English literature, lost because of the war. Here is the frail, delicate intensity of Sara Teasdale to be contrasted with the rich, swooning loveliness of Sassoon. Here is the breezy buoyance of Nichols and the ironic bravado of Bodenheim. And here, too, is my own effort to add something to the well-merited crown of glory which a great English poet-novelist has attained on his eightieth birthday. This little collection is not an ordinary group of poems; it is a link between two nations, an emblem of growth, a proof that poetry is still being written in the English tongue.

John Gould Fletcher.

June, 1920.

CONTENTS



ADAMS, HENRY	
Buddha and Brahma	43
BEERS, HENRY A.	
On Granby Hill	19
BENÉT, STEPHEN VINCENT	
Flood Tide	35
BODENHEIM, MAXWELL	
Rattlesnake Mountain Fable	34
DRINKWATER, JOHN	
Thrift	41
The Pledge	42
FLETCHER, JOHN GOULD	
The Black Rock	26
FROST, ROBERT	
To Edward Thomas	16
LETTS, W. M.	
The Children's Ghosts	37
MASEFIELD, JOHN	
The Passing Strange	9
MIDDLETON, SCUDDER	
The Sun	17
NICHOLS, ROBERT	
Seventeen	20

ROBINSON, EDWIN ARLINGTON

Tact 13

Neighbors 14

SASSOON, SIEGFRIED

Slumber Song 25

TEASDALE, SARA

Songs for Myself 32

UNTERMAYER, LOUIS

Supplication 39

Portrait of a Reactionary 40

WHARTON, EDITH

In Provence 23

AMERICAN & BRITISH VERSE

from The Yale Review



JOHN MASEFIELD



THE PASSING STRANGE

OUT of the earth to rest or range
Perpetual in perpetual change
The unknown passing through the strange.

Water and saltness held together
To tread the dust and stand the weather
And plough the field and stretch the tether.

To pass the wine cup and be witty,
Water the sands and build the city,
Slaughter like devils and have pity,

Be red with rage and pale with lust,
Make beauty come, make peace, make trust,
Water and saltness mixed with dust;

JOHN MASEFIELD

Drive over earth, swim under sea,
Fly in the eagle's secrecy,
Guess where the hidden comets be;

Know all the deathly seeds that still
Queen Helen's beauty, Caesar's will,
And slay them even as they kill,

Fashion an altar for a rood,
Defile a continent with blood,
And watch a brother starve for food;

Love like a madman, shaking, blind
Till self is burnt into a kind
Possession of another mind;

Brood upon beauty till the grace
Of beauty with the holy face
Brings peace into the bitter place;

Probe in the lifeless granites, scan
The stars for hope, for guide, for plan;
Live as a woman or a man;

Fasten to lover or to friend
Until the heart-break at the end,
The break of death that cannot mend;

Then to lie useless, helpless, still
Down in the earth, in dark, to fill
The roots of grass or daffodil.

Down in the earth, in dark, alone,
A mockery of the ghost in bone,
The strangeness passing the, unknown.

Time will go by, that outlasts clocks,
Dawn in the thorps will rouse the cocks,
Sunset be glory on the rocks,

But it, the thing, will never heed
Even the rootling from the seed
Thrusting to suck it for its need.

Since moons decay and suns decline
How else should end this life of mine?
Water and saltness are not wine.

But in the darkest hour of night,
When even the foxes peer for sight,
The byre-cock crows; he feels the light.

So, in this water mixed with dust,
The byre-cock spirit crows from trust
That death will change because it must,

For all things change, the darkness changes,
The wandering spirits change their ranges,
The corn is gathered to the granges.

The corn is sown again, it grows;
The stars burn out, the darkness goes.
The rhythms change, they do not close.

JOHN MASEFIELD

They change, and we, who pass like foam,
Like dust blown through the streets of Rome,
Change ever, too; we have no home,

Only a beauty, only a power,
Sad in the fruit, bright in the flower,
Endlessly erring for its hour

But gathering, as we stray, a sense
Of Life, so lovely and intense,
It lingers when we wander hence,

That those who follow feel behind
Their backs, when all before is blind,
Our joy, a rampart to the mind.

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON



TACT

OBSEVANT of the way she told
So much of what was true,
No vanity could long withhold
Regard that was her due:
She spared him the familiar guile,
So easily achieved,
That only made a man to smile
And left him undeceived.

Aware that all imagining
Of more than what she meant
Would urge an end of everything,
He stayed; and when he went,
They parted with a merry word
That was to him as light
As any that was ever heard
Upon a starry night.

She smiled a little, knowing well
That he would not remark
The ruins of a day that fell
Around her in the dark:

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

He saw no ruins anywhere,
Nor fancied there were scars
On anyone who lingered there,
Alone below the stars.

NEIGHBORS

AS often as we thought of her,
We thought of a gray life
That made a quaint economist
Of a wolf-haunted wife;
We made the best of what she bore
That was not ours to bear,
And honored her for wearing things
That were not things to wear.

There was a distance in her look
That made us look again;
And if she smiled, we might believe
That we had looked in vain.
Rarely she came inside our doors,
And had not long to stay;
And when she left, it seemed somehow
That she was far away.

And once, when we had all forgot
That all is here to change,
A shadow on the commonplace
Was for a moment strange.

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

15

Yet there was nothing for surprise,
Nor much that need be told:
Love, with his gift of pain, had given
More than one heart could hold.

ROBERT FROST



TO EDWARD THOMAS*

I SLUMBERED with your poems on my breast
Spread open as I dropped them half read through
Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb
To see, if, in a dream they brought of you,

I might not have the chance I missed in life
Through some delay, and call you to your face
First soldier, and then poet, and then both,
Who died a soldier-poet of your race.

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain
Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained—
And one thing more that was not then to say:
The Victory for what it lost and gained.

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire
On Vimy Ridge; and when you fell that day
The war seemed over more for you than me,
But now for me than you—the other way.

How over, though, for even me who knew
The foe thrust back unsafe beyond the Rhine,
If I was not to speak of it to you
And see you pleased once more with words of mine?

*The English poet and critic, killed on Easter Monday, 1917.

SCUDDER MIDDLETON



THE SUN

THE little clock is counting
The footsteps of the sun.
Oh, he will surely find us
Before our work is done!

Before we're through with planning,
Before our loves are said,
He'll come with bolt and banner,
Dressed up in eastern red.

He'll tear the moon from heaven
And blind the hopeful stars,
And music will be shattered
By the thunder of his cars.

Like flame he'll leap before us,
He'll hurl his burning darts,
And throw a net of fire
Around our helpless hearts.

Then fools will start their weeping,
The strong will fight for breath,
And some will give their bodies,
Like Jesus Christ, to death.

But he will surely find us!
Concerned with things to be,
He will not hear nor heed us
Who live so presently.

The little clock is counting:
He marches on in haste,
Who daily dreams creation
And lays creation waste.

HENRY A. BEERS



ON GRANBY HILL

ON Granby Hill the air is sweet,
Soft winds blow down each shady street,
The summer days are endless long,
And rich at eve the robin's song
When darkness comes to cool the heat.

Forgotten names my lips repeat,
And round the pathways of my feet
The whispers and the phantoms throng
On Granby Hill.

For strangers now are all I meet,
And no one stops, my face to greet
In this old town where I belong;
But echoes of an ancient wrong
And shadows dwell of hope's defeat
On Granby Hill.

ROBERT NICHOLS



SEVENTEEN

ALL the loud winds were in the garden wood,
All shadows joyfuller than lissome hounds
Doubled in chasing, all exultant clouds
That ever flung fierce mist and eddying fire
Across heavens deeper than blue polar seas
Fled over the sceptre-spikes of the chestnuts
Over the speckle of birches' green.
She shouted; then stood still hushed and abashed
To hear her voice so shrill in that gay roar.
And suddenly her eyelashes were dimmed:
For there were daffodils which sprightly shook
Ten thousand ruffling heads throughout the wood
And every flower of those delighting flowers
Laughed, nodding to her, till she clapped her hands
Crying, "O daffies, could you only speak!"

But there was more. A jay with sky-blue shaft
Set in blunt wing, skimmed screaming on ahead.
She followed him. A murrey squirrel eyed
Her, warily cocked upon tail-plumed haunch,
Then, skipping the whirligig of last year leaves,
Whisked himself out of sight and reappeared
Leering about the bole of a young beech,

And every time she strove to corner him
He scrambled round on little scratchy hands
To peek at her from round the other side.
She lost him, bolting branch to branch, at last,
The impudent brat! But still high overhead
Flight on exuberant flight of opal scud
Or of dissolving mist, florid as flame,
Scattered in ecstasy over the blue. And she
Followed, first walking, giving her bright locks
To the cold fervor of the springtime gale
Whose rush bore the cloud shadow past the cloud
Over the irised wastes of emerald turf.
And still the huge wind volleyed. Save the gulls,
Goldenly in the sunny blast careering,
Or on blue-shadowed underwing at plunge
None shared with her who now could not but run
The splendor and tumult of th' onrushing spring.

And now she ran no more; the gale gave plumes.
One with the shadows whirled along the grass,
One with the onward smother of veering gulls,
One with the pursuit of cloud after cloud,
Swept she. Pure speed coursed in immortal limbs;
Nostrils drank as from wells of unknown air;
Ears received the smooth silence of glassy floods;
Light as of glassy suns froze in her eyes;
Space was given her and she ruled all space.

Spring, author of twifold loveliness,
Who flithest in the mirth of the wild folk,

Profferest greeting in the faces of flowers,
Blowest in the firmamental glory
Renewing in the heart of the sad human
All faiths, guard thou the innocent spirit
Into whose unknowing hands this noontide
Thou pourest treasure scarce yet recognized
That unashamed before man's glib wisdom,
Unabashed beneath the wrath of chance,
She accept in simplicity of homage
The hidden holiness, the created emblem
To be in her, until death shall take her,
The secret source of an eternal spring.

EDITH WHARTON



IN PROVENCE

I

Mistral in the Maquis

ROOFED in with creaking pines we lie
And see the waters burn and whiten,
The wild seas race the racing sky,
The tossing landscape gloom and lighten.

With emerald streak and silver blotch
The white wind paints the purple sea.
Warm in our hollow dune we watch
The honey-orchis nurse the bee.

Gold to the keel the startled boats
Beat in on palpitating sail,
While overhead with many throats
The choral forest hymns the gale.

'Neath forest-boughs the templed air
Hangs hushed as when the Host is lifted,
While, flanks astrain and rigging bare,
The last boat to the port has drifted.

Nought left but the lost wind that grieves
On darkening seas and furling sails,
And the long light that Beauty leaves
Upon her fallen veils. . . .

II

The Young Dead

Ah, how I pity the young dead who gave
All that they were, and might become, that we
With tired eyes should watch this perfect sea
Re-weave its patterning of silver wave
Round scented cliffs of arbutus and bay.

No more shall any rose along the way,
The myrtled way that wanders to the shore,
Nor jonquil-twinkling meadow any more,
Nor the warm lavender that takes the spray,
Smell only of sea-salt and the sun,

But, through recurring seasons, every one
Shall speak to us with lips the darkness closes,
Shall look at us with eyes that missed the roses,
Clutch us with hands whose work was just begun,
Laid idle now beneath the earth we tread—

And always we shall walk with the young dead.—
Ah, how I pity the young dead, whose eyes
Strain through the sod to see these perfect skies,
Who feel the new wheat springing in their stead,
And the lark singing for them overhead!

SIEGFRIED SASSOON



SLUMBER SONG

SLEEP; and my song shall build about your bed
A Paradise of dimness. You shall feel
The folding of tired wings; and peace will dwell
Throned in your silence: and one hour shall hold
Summer, and midnight, and immensity
Lulled to forgetfulness. For, where you dream,
The stately gloom of foliage shall embower
Your slumbering thought with tapestries of blue.
And there shall be no memory of the sky,
Nor sunlight with its cruelty of swords.
But, to your soul that sinks from deep to deep
Through drowned and glimmering color, time shall be
Only rhythmic swaying; and your breath;
And roses in the darkness; and my love.

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER



THE BLACK ROCK

To Thomas Hardy

I

OFF the long headland, threshed about by round-
backed breakers,
There is a black rock, standing high at the full tide;
Off the headland there is emptiness,
And the moaning of the ocean,
And the black rock standing alone.

In the orange wake of sunset,
When the gulls have fallen silent,
And the winds slip out and meet together from the edges
of the sea,
Settled down in the dark water,
Fragment of the earth abandoned,
Ragged and huge the black rock stands.

It is as if it listened,
Stood and listened very intently
To the everlasting swish and boom and hiss of spray,
Listened to the creeping-on of night;
While afar off, to the westward,

Dark clouds silently are packed together,
With a dull red glow between.

It is listening, it is lonely;
For the sunlight
Showed it houses near the headland,
Trees and flowers;
For the sunlight caused to grow upon it scanty blades of
grass,
In the crannies of the rock,
Here and there;
For the sunlight brought it back remembrance of a world
Long rejected
And long lost;
Showed it white sails near the coast,
Children paddling in the bay,
Signs of life and kinship with mankind
Long forgot.
Now the sunset leaves it there,
Bare, rejected, a black scrap of rock,
Battered by the tides,
Wallowing in the sea.

Bleak, adrift,
Shattered like a monstrous ship of stone,
Left aground
By the waters, on its voyage;
With no foot to touch its deck,
With no hand to lift its sails,
There it stands.

II

Gulls wheel near it in the sunlight,
White backs flash;
Gray wings eddy, curl, are lifted, swept away,
On a wave;
Gulls pass rapidly in the sunlight
Round about it.

Gulls pass, screaming harshly to the wave-thrusts,
Laughing in uncanny voices;
Lonely flocks of great white birds,
Like to ghosts;
But the black rock does not welcome them,
Knows by heart already all their cries;
Hears, repeated, for the millionth millionth time
All the bitterness of ocean
Howling through their voices.

It still dreams of other things,
Of the cities and the fields,
And the lands near to the coast
Where the lonely grassy valleys
Full of dun herds deeply browsing,
Sweep in wide curves to the sea;

It still holds the memory
Of the wild bees booming, murmuring,
In the fields of thyme and clover,
And the shadows of broad trees
Towards noon:

It still lifts its huge scarred sides
Vainly to the burning glare of sun,
With the memory of doom
Thick upon them;
And the hope that by some fate
It may come once more to be
Part of all the earth it had;

Freed from clamor of the waves,
From the broken planks and wreckage
Drifting aimless here and there,
With the tides;
Freed to share its life with earth,
And to be a dwelling-place
For the outcast tribes of men,
Once again.

III

In the morning,
When the dark clouds whirl swift over,
From the southeast, dragging with them
Heavy curtains of gray rain,

The black rock rejoices.
All its little gullies drip with cool refreshing showers.
All the crannies, all the steeps,
All the meagre sheltered places
Fill with drip and tinkle of the rain.

But when afternoon between the clouds
Leaves adrift cool patches of blue sky,
Floating like deep stretches of the sea,
Between flocs of polar snow;

Then the rock is all aflame:
Diamonds, emeralds, topazes,
Burn and shatter, and it seems
Like a garden filled with flowers.

Like a garden where the rapid wheeling lights
And black shadows lift and sway and fall;
Spring and summer and red autumn chase each other
Moment after moment, on its face.

So, till sunset
Lifts once more its lonely crimson torch,
Menacing and mournful, far away;
Then an altar left abandoned, it stands facing all the
horizon
Where the light departs.

Massive black and crimson towers,
Cities carved by the wind from out the clouds of sunset
look at it;
It has dreamed them, it has made this sacrifice,
Now it sees their rapid passing,
Soon it will be bleak and all alone.

IV

Abrupt and broken rock,
Black rock, awash in the midst of the waters,
Lonely, aloof, deserted,
Impotent to change;
Storm-clouds lift off,
The dawn strikes the hills far inland.
But you are forever tragic and apart,
Forever battling with the sea;
Till the waves have ground you to dust—
Till the ages are all accomplished,
Till you have relinquished the last reluctant fragment
To the gnawing teeth of the wave;
I know the force of your patience,
I have shared your grim silent struggle,
The mad dream you have, and will not abandon,
To cover your strength with gay flowers;
Keel of the world, apart,
I have lived like you.
Some men are soil of the earth;
Their lives are broad harvest fields
Green in the spring, and gold in their season,
Then barren and mown;
But those whom my soul has loved
Are bare rocks standing off headlands;
Cherishing, perhaps, a few bitter wild flowers,
That bloom in the granite, year after year.

SARA TEASDALE



SONGS FOR MYSELF

Alone

I AM alone, in spite of love,
In spite of all I take and give—
In spite of your wild tenderness,
Sometimes I am not glad to live.

I am alone, as though I stood
On the highest peak of the tired gray world,
About me only swirling snow,
Above me endless space unfurled;

With earth hidden and heaven hidden
And only my own spirit's pride
To keep me from the peace of those
Who are not lonely, having died.

Song-Making

My heart cried like a beaten child
Ceaselessly all night long;
I had to take my own heart cries
And thread them into a song.

One was a sob at black midnight
And one when the first cock crew—
My heart cried like a beaten child,
But no one ever knew.

Life, you have put me in your debt
And I must serve you late and long—
But oh, the debt is terrible
That must be paid in song.

Winter Dusk

I watch the great clear twilight
Veiling the ice-bowed trees;
Their branches tinkle faintly
With crystal melodies.

The larches bend their silver
Over the hush of snow;
One star is lighted in the west,
Two in the zenith glow.

For a moment I have forgotten
Wars and women who mourn—
I think of the mother who bore me,
And thank her that I was born.

MAXWELL BODENHEIM



RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN FABLE

ROUNDED to a wide-eyed clownishness,
Crowned by the shifting bravado
Of his long, brown ears,
The rabbit peeked at the sky.
To him, the sky seemed an angelic
Pasture stripped to phantom tranquillity,
Where one could nibble thoughtfully.
He longed to leave his mild furtiveness
And speak to a boldness puzzled by his flesh.
With one long circle of despairing grace
He flashed into the air,
Leaping toward his heaven.
But down he crashed against a snake
Who ate him with a meditative interest
And seasoned him with drops of evening wind.
But from that day the snake was filled
With little meek whispers of concern.
The crushed and peaceful rabbit's dream
Cast a groping hush upon his blood.
He curled inertly on a rock,
In cryptic, wilted savageness.
In the end, his dry, gray body
Was scattered out upon the rock,
Like a story that could not be told.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET



FLOOD TIDE

*L*IFE went whistling a catch, between the plum and
the cherry
Rolling a blossom of pink-like almonds under his tongue,
Looked at us all as we grew and made exceedingly merry,
"Lord! how I'll dibble and prune, when you aren't so
beautifully young!"

There was moon like a spilling of milky sap from the sky,
And the tree of the sky was a candle of creamy flame,
Each white-fire leaf of a star distinct; and old wind went
by
Hooded in dark and ashamed as it whispered some mut-
tering name.

We were huddled up in the launch like a sleepy parcel of
birds.
The plunging silence engulfed us. We heard as if we had
died
The throb of the engine's heart erase our tiptoeing words,
And the slow, mysterious mouth of the water against the
side.

If you dripped your fingers awave, wet star dust clung to
the skin,
Spangling the wax-cool hand with the pollen and seeds of
dawn,
And the wake like a fish of fire went twisting alive within
The willow-dark cage of green, and in splinters of foam
was gone.

Then we saw the cloudy old house, and the waters deep
at its stair,
Bright in an endless flood, irradiate, calm, and wise,
Like the milk-white body of Truth asleep in her naked
hair,
And the blood and strength of the Earth arose to our
dazzling eyes!
Quiet, quiet, and quiet, said the march of the wave be-
neath.
Oh, immaculate shone the mind as the lotos of silence
grew!
And the sore heart heavy with youth was a clean blade
straight in its sheath,
As we drank with a matchless dream in that chrism of salt
and dew!

*Death jams down on his spade in the bloom of our elvish
orchard,
Even the root-curly crawl at the skeleton jokes he cracks;
Let's hold boughs for a while, as our Youth goes out to
be tortured,
We shall remember a moon till they hew us under the axe!*

W. M. LETTS



THE CHILDREN'S GHOSTS

HEROD sitting on his throne,
Lest he should hear the children moan,
And lose awhile his careless ease,
Bade sackbuts play and psalteries,
Bade flutes and tabors take their part
To cheat the terror in his heart,
To drown the wailing of a child
That came upon the storm wind wild.

Herod, lord of armed hosts,
Had fear of murdered babies' ghosts.
He bade his dancing girls appear
That they might dance away his fear.
He called his nobles in to dine
And drugged his sullen soul with wine.
But when at night he lay asleep
The little ghosts drew near to weep. . . .

So old and new the sacrifice
When innocents must pay the price.
Age after age the children give
Their lives that Herod still may live—
They shiver naked in the cold

That he may dress in cloth of gold.
Piteous and pale for lack of bread
They starve to keep his table spread.

Now Herod bids you turn away
Lest, through your jazz-bands loud and gay,
The Eastern wind should bear the cry
Of starving babies doomed to die.
He bids you mothers take no heed
Of all the mothers' hearts that bleed,
But turn the spectre from the door
And lay up food and clothes in store.

But if you be not Herod's kin
The little ghosts will enter in,
Will take your hands and unafraid
Tell you their tale and crave your aid:
"No longer now we suffer pain,
But let these others laugh again.
Make haste! Before it is too late!
For Death stands knocking at the gate!"

LOUIS UNTERMAYER



SUPPLICATION

TAKE away your soft hair and your softer lips,
Loose me from your twining fingers; turn away
your eyes.

For I loved this earth, and now a greater passion slips
All its earthly ties.

I can wait for heaven, if that is to be;
Let me have these common days and know their simple
worth.

Do not make the quiet-colored moments dull to me—
Let me keep the earth.

There is much I long to look at, much I long to taste.
You have mocked a thousand raptures with contemp-
tuous power.

Do not let your beauty lay all other beauty waste;
Spare a casual hour.

Let old music thrill me to my finger tips;
Bring me back the glamour of the things I used to
prize;

Lift this cloudy radiance where I only see your lips—
Turn away your eyes!

PORTRAIT OF A REACTIONARY

WARM in a fog of musty platitudes,
You wear your satisfaction like a cloak;
As, with an easy worship, you invoke
A flabby faith that knows no stormy moods.
What little there is living in you turns
To dead ideas and nodding gentlefolk.
Where others flame, you sputter a thin smoke
While everything around you flares and burns.

The bright, adventurous world goes swiftly by
To eager conflict, battle-crying days—
But what to you are all the wars unfought?
Ox-like, complacent in your sloth, you lie
And ruminate and shift your watery gaze,
Chewing the cud of predigested thought.

JOHN DRINKWATER



THRIFT

NO beauty beauty overthrows,
But every joy its season knows,
And all enchanted hours prepare
Enchantment for to-morrow's wear.

Who in the just society
That walks with him this hour can see
But shadows of another bliss,
Loses both that delight and this.

Grieve not the parting day, for soon
The nightingales will sing the moon
Climbing the track that now the sun
Leaves when the songs of day are done.

And grieve not when her beauty fails,
And silence keeps the nightingales,
For that eclipse again will bring
The sun with all his birds to sing.

THE PLEDGE

WHEN love is bright and whole again,
I'll sing like the bee's weather,
I'll set my colors up again

Like the cock-pheasant's feather,
I'll find a note to make me one
With lyric birds that sing the sun.

I'll fill my songs with palmer's buds
And sprigs of thorn for Whitsunday,
And they shall dance as willow rods
And shine with garlands of the may,
I'll be a theme that takes the spring
From bushes where the blackbirds sing.

I'll walk among my sheep again
And turn my steps to numbers,
When love is bright and whole again
And fear has gone to slumbers,
With wings again and flowers and stars
To be my colored calendars.

HENRY ADAMS



BUDDHA AND BRAHMA

TO JOHN HAY

26 April, 1895.

MY DEAR JOHN:

Once La Farge and I, on our rambles, stopped for an hour to meditate under the sacred Bo-tree of Buddha in the ruined and deserted city of Anuradjapura in the jungle of Ceylon; and, then, resuming our course, we presently found ourselves on the quiet bosom of the Indian Ocean. Perhaps I was a little bored by the calm of the tropical sea, or perhaps it was the greater calm of Buddha that bored me. At all events I amused a tedious day or two by jotting down in a notebook the lines which you profess to want. They are yours. Do not let them go further.

Ever affectionately,

HENRY ADAMS.

THE Buddha, known to men by many names—
Siddartha, Sakya Muni, Blessed One,—
Sat in the forest, as had been his wont
These many years since he attained perfection;
In silent thought, abstraction, purity,
His eyes fixed on the Lotus in his hand,
He meditated on the perfect Life,
While his disciples, sitting round him, waited
His words of teaching, every syllable

More and more precious as the Master gently
Warned them how near was come his day of parting.
In silence, as the Master gave example,
They meditated on the Path and Law,
Till one, Malunka, looking up and speaking,
Said to the Buddha: "O Omniscient One,
Teach us, if such be in the Perfect Way,
Whether the World exists eternally."

The Buddha made no answer, and in silence
All the disciples bent their contemplation
On the perfection of the Eight-fold Way,
Until Malunka spoke again: "O Master,
What answer shall we offer to the Brahman
Who asks us if our Master holds the World
To be, or not, Eternal?"

Still the Buddha sat
As though he heard not, contemplating
The pure white Lotus in his sacred hand,
Till a third time Malunka questioned him:
"Lord of the World, we know not what we ask;
We fear to teach what thou hast not made pure."

Then gently, still in silence, lost in thought,
The Buddha raised the Lotus in his hand,
His eyes bent downward, fixed upon the flower.
No more! A moment so he held it only,
Then his hand sank into its former rest.

Long the disciples pondered on the lesson.
Much they discussed its mystery and meaning,

Each finding something he could make his own,
Some hope or danger in the Noble Way,
Some guide or warning to the Perfect Life.
Among them sat the last of the disciples,
Listening and pondering, silently and still;
And when the scholars found no certain meaning
In Buddha's answer to Malunka's prayer,
The young man pondered: I will seek my father,
The wisest man of all men in the world,
And he with one word will reveal this secret,
And make me in an instant reach the light
Which these in many years have not attained
Though guided by the Buddha and the Law.

So the boy sought his father—an old man
Famous for human wisdom, subtle counsel,
Boldness in action, recklessness in war—
Gautama's friend, the Rajah of Mogadha.
No follower of Buddha, but a Brahman,
Devoted first to Vishnu, then to caste,
He made no sign of anger or remonstrance
When his son left him at Siddartha's bidding
To take the vows of poverty and prayer—
If Vishnu willed it, let his will be done!

The Rajah sat at evening in his palace,
Deep in the solitude of his own thought,
When silently the young man entering
Crouched at a distance, waiting till his father
Should give some sign of favor. Then he spoke:

"Father, you are wise! I come to ask you
A secret meaning none of us can read;
For, when Malunka three times asked the Master
Whether the world was or was not eternal,
Siddartha for a moment lifted up
The Lotus, and kept silence."

The Rajah pondered long, with darkened features,
As though in doubt increasing. Then he said:
"Reflect, my son! The Master had not meant
This last and deepest lesson to be learned
From any but himself—by any means
But silent thought, abstraction, purity,
The living spirit of his Eight-fold Way,
The jewels of his Lotus. Least of all
Had he, whose first and easiest lesson taught
The nothingness of caste, intended you
To seek out me, a Warrior, Kshatriya,
Knowing no duties but to caste and sword,
To teach the Buddha and unveil his shrine.
My teaching is not his; mine not his way;
You quit your Master when you question me."

Silent they sat, and long. Then slowly spoke
The younger: "Father, you are wise.
I must have wisdom." "Not so, my son.
Old men are often fools, but young men always.
Your duty is to act; leave thought to us."
The younger sat in patience, eyes cast down,
Voice low and gentle as the Master taught;

But still repeated the same prayer: "You are wise;
I must have wisdom. Life for me is thought,
But, were it action, how, in youth or age,
Can man act wisely, leaving thought aside?"

The Rajah made no answer, but almost
His mouth seemed curving to a sudden smile
That hardened to a frown; and then he spoke:
"If Vishnu wills it, let his will be done!
The child sees jewels on his father's sword,
And cries until he gets it for a plaything.
He cannot use it but it wound himself;
Its perfect workmanship wakes no delight;
Its jewels are for him but common glass;
The sword means nothing that the child can know;
But when at last the child has grown to man,
Has learned the beauty of the weapon's art,
And proved its purpose on the necks of men,
Still must he tell himself, as I tell you:
Use it, but ask no questions! *Think not! Strike!*
This counsel you reject, for you want wisdom.
So be it! Yet I swear to you in truth
That all my wisdom lies in these three words.

"You ask Gautama's meaning, for you know
That since his birth, his thoughts and acts alike
Have been to me a mirror, clearer far
Than to himself, for no man sees himself.
With the solemnity of youth, you ask
Of me, on whom the charm of childhood still

Works greater miracles than magicians know,
To tell, as though it were a juggler's trick
The secret meaning which himself but now
Could tell you only by a mystic sign,
The symbol of a symbol—so far-thought,
So vague and vast and intricate its scope.
And I, whom you compel to speak for him,
Must give his thought through mine, for his
Passes your powers—yours and all your school.

“Your Master, Sakya Muni, Gautama,
Is, like myself and you, a Kshatriya,
And in our youths we both, like you, rebelled
Against the priesthood and their laws of caste.
We sought new paths, desperate to find escape
Out of the jungle that the priests had made.
Gautama found a path. You follow it.
I found none, and I stay here, in the jungle,
Content to tolerate what I cannot mend.
I blame not him or you, but would you know
Gautama's meaning, you must fathom mine.
He failed to cope with life; renounced its cares;
Fled to the forest, and attained the End,
Reaching the End by sacrificing life.
You know both End and Path. You, too, attain.
I could not. Ten years older, I;
Already trained to rule, to fight, to scheme,
To strive for objects that I dared not tell,
Not for myself alone, but for us all;

Had I thrown down my sword, and fled my throne,
Not all the hermits, priests, and saints of Ind,
Buddhist or Brahman, could have saved our heads
From rolling in the dirt; for Rajahs know
A quicker than the Eight-fold Noble Way
To help their scholars to attain the End.
Renounce I could not, and could not reform.
How could I battle with the Brahman priests,
Or free the people from the yoke of caste,
When, with the utmost aid that priests could give,
And willing service from each caste in turn,
I saved but barely both my throne and them?

“So came it that our paths were separate,
And his led up to so supreme a height
That from its summit he can now look down
And see where still the jungle stifles me.
Yet was our starting-point the same, and though
We now seem worlds apart—hold fast to this!—
The Starting-point must be the End-point too!
You know the Veda, and need not be taught
The first and last idea of all true knowledge:
One single spirit from which all things spring;
One thought containing all thoughts possible;
Not merely those that we, in our thin reason,
Hold to be true, but all their opposites;
For Brahma is Beginning, Middle, End,
Matter and Mind, Time, Space, Form, Life and Death.
The Universal has no limit. Thought

Travelling in constant circles, round and round,
Must ever pass through endless contradictions,
Returning on itself at last, till lost
In silence.

“This is the Veda, as you know,
The alphabet of all philosophy,
For he who cannot or who dares not grasp
And follow this necessity of Brahma,
Is but a fool and weakling; and must perish
Among the follies of his own reflection.

“Your Master, you, and I, and all wise men,
Have one sole purpose which we never lose:
Through different paths we each seek to attain,
Sooner or later, as our paths allow,
A perfect union with the single Spirit.
Gautama’s way is best, but all are good.
He breaks a path at once to what he seeks.
By silence and absorption he unites
His soul with the great soul from which it started.
But we, who cannot fly the world, must seek
To live two separate lives; one, in the world
Which we must ever seem to treat as real;
The other in ourselves, behind a veil
Not to be raised without disturbing both.

“The Rajah is an instrument of Brahma,
No more, no less, than sunshine, lightning, rain;
And when he meets resistance in his path,

And when his sword falls on a victim's neck,
It strikes as strikes the lightning—as it must;
Rending its way through darkness to the point
It needs must seek, by no choice of its own.
Thus in the life of Ruler, Warrior, Master,
The wise man knows his wisdom has no place,
And when most wise, we act by rule and law,
Talk to conceal our thought, and think
Only within the range of daily need,
Ruling our subjects while ourselves rebel,
Death always on our lips and in our act.

“This is the jungle in which we must stay.
According to the teachings of the Master,
Never can we attain the Perfect Life.
Yet in this world of selfishness and striving
The wise man lives as deeply sunk in silence,
As conscious of the Perfect Life he covets,
As any recluse in his forest shadows,
As any Yogi in his mystic trances.
We need no Noble Way to teach us Freedom
Amid the clamor of a world of slaves.
We need no Lotus to love purity
Where life is else corruption.

“So read Siddartha's secret! He has taught
A certain pathway to attain the End;
And best and simplest yet devised by man,
Yet still so hard that every energy
Must be devoted to its sacred law.

